

THURSTON

MEMORANDUM

AUGUST 21, 1961

To: The President  
From: The Vice President

Before discussing the questions raised in our mission, I wish to present some general observations as a background to my report.

The significance and accomplishment of our mission to Germany cannot be fully understood unless one gives proper weight to the role of public opinion in West Germany as an important factor in the shaping of German policy. Both in Bonn and in West Berlin the importance of public opinion was evident.

I felt this influence in my quiet discussions with Chancellor Adenauer no less than with Mayor Brandt in Berlin where the unprecedented demonstration of freedom has been said to have no parallel at all, unless it be in the enthusiasm and joy of Europe in the hour of its liberation in 1945, or in Berlin when the blockade was lifted.

In West Berlin I saw signs with the slogan, "Washington is closer than Bonn." Nothing would have been easier, or more destructive, than to have allowed our cause, by one word or action or indiscretion, to become entangled in the election campaign now confusing the German political scene. That risk, I believe, was successfully avoided.

From my opening statement to my message of farewell it was my constant purpose to remove doubts and anxieties about American policy in the face of the new Communist challenge. Immeasurably more important and more reassuring than any words of mine, however, was General Clay's and my presence in Germany at this difficult period as your personal representatives.

Without diminishing in any way the importance of the British and French contribution, I must emphasize that the overwhelming tendency in Germany, both among official leaders and public opinion, was to regard the present crisis as being essentially a confrontation of power between the Soviet Union and the United States.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority Walter J. R. Strode 1/2/70  
By W. J. R. S., NARS, Date 5/6/71

SECRET

Page 2

If we failed to rise to the level of these sombre events, all would be lost, for there would be no one who could remove the sense of failure created by our default.

On this supreme issue the only valid and convincing judges must be the German people and leadership themselves. Although the record still is incomplete, the German testimony is already strong enough to justify the conclusion that we have met the present test.

We have the opportunity now, in my judgment, to present the Berlin issue in a way that will profoundly appeal to the American people. In some ways we have advantages now in Berlin that were denied to us in Europe during the war years.

The contrast between freedom and tyranny is so palpable that it is felt almost as a physical presence in the divided city. As I drove through certain streets in Berlin, people whose homes were on the border of East Berlin ran to the rear windows to throw roses on my car. When I visited the reception center for the refugees, an old lady gave me a bouquet and told me she had picked the flowers just before she had fled from East Berlin. As I looked up, I saw the ruins of a building that had been wrecked by our bombers in the war, and here was a German woman kissing my hand in gratitude. I met a little girl, five years old, who had swum to freedom across a canal separating East and West Berlin on the back of a friend, and here she was in the freedom of West Berlin.

While the whole world is watching Berlin we have a greater opportunity than we have ever had to drive home the unforgettable contrast between despotism and a free society. All of the Soviet Union's years of efforts in East Berlin have led to barbed wire and sealed borders, to empty streets and haggard stores, to tanks of oppression and fear of the people, to economic squalor and political servitude.

That is Russia's record. It is a record of shame, of repression; we should never let the Soviet Union, or the world, forget it.

SECRET

Page 5.

Colonel John, the commander of the troops sent by your direction to Berlin, did not know whether the convoy would be challenged at the check points. But he was determined to bring the convoy to Berlin and to do so on time. He did both.

No one who saw the arrival of our troops and the welcome they received, can ever forget the scene. Thousands of Germans cheered and waved flags of greeting; women brought flowers to our soldiers; and the sight of our heavy military equipment brought the greatest cheers of all. There could be no stronger proof that the power of America brings hope and freedom to West Berlin, while the power of the Soviet Union brings fear and oppression to East Berlin.

It is impossible at this stage to predict with certainty how long the strengthened morale of West Berlin will remain high. But at least we are now able to influence the flow of events and to influence them in ways that will cause difficulties for Communist expansion.

Your choice of General Lucius Clay for our mission was an inspired decision. His name and fame have an almost legendary power among the people of Berlin. I believe that his return to a position of responsibility in Berlin would have an immediate and immense influence in stabilizing and strengthening our whole position.

I must acknowledge, with gratitude, the steady and sage counsel of Ambassador Bohlen, and the assistance of the other members of the State Department. I must also acknowledge the numberless courtesies and constant help of Ambassador Dowling and his staff in both Bonn and Berlin. Without the devoted service of all these people, our mission could not have achieved its measure of success.

Here are my personal observations on the facts I observed and the conclusions I drew.

1. The leaders of West Berlin and West Germany are less critical of the United States than press dispatches have indicated they were. Conversations with both Chancellor Adenauer and Mayor Brandt made it clear that there is no basic disagreement on our policies toward Berlin and West Germany.

Page 4.

2. Nevertheless, these leaders told us that there is great anxiety among the German people because of the obvious success of the Communists in shutting off the flow of refugees from East to West Germany through Berlin. The frustrating inability of the Western powers to counter this move had set off despondency in West Berlin and West Germany which could be explosive.

3. Even the most cursory inspection of the sector border makes it clear that there is no way now known to relieve the plight of those seeking escape from East Germany except by force. Physical barriers of concrete and barbed wire thoroughly policed by armed guards cover every inch of the sector border and have reduced the possibilities of flight to the absolute minimum.

4. The appearance of our group in Berlin was unquestionably successful in bolstering sagging morale and building up the faith of Berliners in the determination of the United States to stand by its commitments. At least a million people turned out voluntarily on short notice on a Saturday afternoon to wave joyously as our caravan traveled through the streets. The faces of the men and women were a study in smiles and tears of relief. There was an unmistakable outpouring of emotion and thankfulness.

5. The entry of our combat group on Sunday was equally effective in raising the morale of the people of Berlin. Our troops were greeted in an exalted mood which at times approached frenzy. The appearance of tank carriers evoked demonstrations of special intensity and consideration might be given to moving more "heavy" equipment into Berlin for its morale effect.

6. Nevertheless, we must frankly face up to the fact that there may be another letdown in spirit as the effects of the division of Berlin continue to operate. Virtually every Berliner with whom we talked has a story about families torn apart and unable to obtain information about the fate of loved ones who may be no more than a few blocks away. We must be prepared with plans for a series of moves to counter these anticipated letdowns -- possibly through further visits by high officials of the Western Alliance or by adding further to the strength of Western forces in Berlin. In addition,

SHOREFF

Page 4.

the problem of the refugees must be kept under continuous and constant review in a search for a workable program that will offer some hope to those who seek an escape from Communist tyranny. We seem to have convinced the people of West Berlin and West Germany that we "will hold the line." But we have not convinced them that there is any future for those who are already caught on the "wrong" side of the line.

7. Attached to this memorandum is a report on our conversations with Chancellor Adenauer and Mayor Brandt. This includes a point-by-point discussion of Mayor Brandt's letter to you and your reply to him which we delivered. These reports speak for themselves.

8. Considering, as we do, that the Communist move in Berlin is an important part of the broader conflict between the free world and the Communist bloc, rather than an isolated local event, I believe that we should continue to deal with the move primarily in the development of our overall policy for meeting the Soviet threat. This would involve principally stepping up the pace of our military preparations and exploiting this new Communist repression in our propaganda. In addition, however, we must continue to recognize the great importance of West Berlin morale, and to take the necessary steps to keep it high. My mission to Berlin and the reinforcement of our garrison in the city were successful efforts in this direction, but it is hard to tell how long this effect will last. We must, therefore, continue giving Berlin morale careful attention.

9. In addition, I believe we should discourage United States participation in the Leipzig Fair in September in support of the West German move. We should also agree to the selective ban on the issuance of Temporary Travel Documents to representatives of the Ulbricht regime as proposed by the British and supported by our other NATO allies. It is not that doing these things is terribly important, but not doing them would be, because our allies -- particularly the Germans -- would not understand our failure to take these steps.

~~SECRET~~

Page 6.

10. In summary, the mission which you sent to Germany succeeded in its primary purpose of clearing the air of misunderstandings and building up the confidence of Germans in the United States and the Western Alliance. We recovered lost ground. But we must not blind ourselves to the fact that there are further problems which cannot be solved by a show of the flag or a show of military strength. So long as the people of Berlin are physically divided, there will be doubts about Western strength and despair about the future. This is a problem which should be submitted to our best minds for careful analysis.

###

15

~~SECRET~~

Report

Visitation to Germany

By

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson

August 19-20, 1961

DECLASSIFIED

Authority State Attn. 11-3-74  
By lhuu, NARS, Date 3-15-77

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Topics in Report

- A. Summary of Confidential Discussion between the Vice President and Chancellor Adenauer, August 19, 1961.
- B. Summary of Discussion between the Vice President and Mayor Brandt, August 19, 1961.
- C. General Observations.
- D. Recommendations.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

A. Summary of Confidential Discussion Between the Vice President  
and Chancellor Adenauer, August 19, 1961.

The Chancellor recommended, as a matter of great urgency, that economic sanctions should be carefully prepared and then applied. He was assured that this recommendation would be transmitted to the President.

It was impressed upon the Chancellor that the United States had already made substantial sacrifices and was prepared to make even more in co-operation with our Allies. Specific reference was made to the fact that the President had asked for an amount of defense funds never before equalled in peacetime, and that the Congress had appropriated even more than the President had requested. This was cited to illustrate the serious determination of the American people that we should support our commitments with our national power and national resources.

It was further emphasized that our determination would be impaired only by conviction that the United States was being asked to bear a disproportionate burden relative to others, and by criticism from our friends and Allies who were not doing as much as they reasonably should.

It was made clear to the Chancellor that we viewed the Berlin situation as a common cause for free people and that, along with the U. S., additional effort should be made by Germany, France, and the United Kingdom without delay.

There was discussion of the issues raised by Mayor Brandt's letter to the President, a reply to which was being delivered the next day. The Chancellor expressed his disapproval of the Mayor's letter. He was, in turn, informed that the U. S. had reacted decisively to the Berlin situation as evidenced by the President's sending the Vice President and General Clay to Bonn and Berlin, and by his directing that additional equipped troops be sent to Berlin concurrently.

It was again pointed out that our prompt actions following the closing off of East Berlin should be considered with the previously mentioned military buildup as a coordinated action rather than as isolated events.

The Chancellor was told that the President's current difficulties with the Congress, as regards funds for the Mutual Security program,

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

stemmed to a considerable degree from the belief that the U.S. was carrying more than its share in the fight against the Communists.

The Chancellor listened most attentively to this exposition of our determination, our actions, and our desire for multilateral participation in meeting the situation created by the USSR. He indicated his understanding of the need for more equal sharing of the burden, and expressed agreement that the Germans must do more to help themselves. In that connection, he stated that he was prepared to extend the period for military conscription in West Germany and that he planned to announce such policy after his election. He further stated that West Germany's Defense Minister Straus had already discussed with Secretary of Defense McNamara various possibilities for increasing West Germany's military strength.

While the Chancellor's determination to do more was clear, it was also clear that we could not expect much additional from the West German people prior to the election.

In response to the Chancellor's reference to various possibilities for increasing West Germany's military strength, it was agreed that the various restrictions placed upon West Germany might well be evaluated anew in light of the present situation. However, no commitment or suggestions as to changes and restrictions were made.

B. Summary of Discussion Between the Vice President and Mayor Brandt, August 19, 1961.

The Mayor was informed of the unfortunate repercussions from his publicized letter to the President. In so doing, it was stressed that the Soviet action in closing off the East Berlin sector had made abundantly clear to the world that life under a Communist regime compared most unfavorably to conditions in the free portion of Berlin. Initially, the propaganda effect of their action had been adverse to the Soviets. It was then pointed out that the Mayor's complaint and the alarm generated thereby among the West Berliners had shifted the propaganda effect so that it now appeared like a show of Western weakness versus Soviet strength.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

The Mayor was advised, however, that all the points in his letter had been carefully considered in Washington, even though it had proved impossible to agree with them. The Mayor was further advised that American policy was set forth clearly and candidly in the President's reply to him.

After this evaluation of the U.S. reaction to his letter, the Mayor was told that the purpose of this visit was not to engage in prolonged recriminations about something which was now history, but rather was to reason with him in quiet cooperation.

The Mayor reacted most favorably to this candid approach. He expressed regret that the letter had been given unauthorized publication, and denied responsibility for the disclosure of its contents. In fact, he made little effort to justify the letter except to express the conviction that it had helped move American policy off "dead center."

In discussing the recommendations which the Mayor had made, it was emphasized that the U.S. could not accept his proposal to replace the four-power treaty with a three-power arrangement, or to place the Berlin issue before the United Nations at this time. The latter was amplified by pointing out that the General Assembly was currently involved by the Bizerte problem. The Mayor agreed that his recommendations in these respects might well have been ill advised.

He was told that we understood the reaction of the West Berliners to having the city divided by concrete, barbed wire, and armed Communists. It was pointed out, however, that we had responded to the threat with action. The following actions by the President were cited:  
a. request to the Congress for about \$7 billion additional defense money;  
b. calling up of thousands of young Americans to active duty; c. extending the period of military service; d. sending the Vice President and General Clay to Berlin; e. dispatching additional American troops and equipment to Berlin.

This recitation of positive action clearly impressed the Mayor and he agreed that it was necessary for the West Berliners to do more to help themselves. He emphasized this point by stating that the United States should not be expected to carry the load by itself, nor should other countries be asked to increase their contribution unless the people of West Berlin did their part in the joint cause.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

- 4 -

The Mayor was told of our substantial respect for West Berlin's energetic population and economic productivity, as well as for its courage in facing the Communist challenge. It was pointed out to him, however, that this respect would be compromised and support would become more difficult to obtain if West Berliners failed to make a real effort in the defense of their city and their freedom.

The Mayor indicated his agreement with this analysis and stated that he favored a greater contribution on the part of West Berliners. His reaction was friendly and cooperative.

C. Observations.

1. The morale of the West Berliners and Free World confidence in American policy was greatly improved by the visit and by the arrival of American troops.
2. The single most important element in this success was the appearance of American tanks, manned by U.S. soldiers.
3. This restoration of morale, however, cannot be considered permanent, and hence other actions should be planned and should be undertaken before the morale suffers another serious decline.
4. The Soviets have demonstrated that they can seal the border and they will undoubtedly propagandize a picture of the NATO allies being impotent to unseal it.
5. Closing of the escape route for East Berliners will tend to generate a feeling of hopelessness on their part. It would be unwarranted to conclude that this will create significant difficulties for the Soviets as they have had much successful experience in suppressing dissatisfied populations.
6. As an immediate problem, it is more important to attempt to solve the refugee situation than to divert energy toward plans for preventing the Soviets from taking over West Berlin. It is unlikely that Premier Khrushchev has the latter on his present schedule.
7. Those who participated in this recent visit to Germany returned with new pride in America's leadership, but with an accentuated awareness of the responsibility which rests upon this country.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

- 1 -

**D. Recommendations.**

There is no single or simple solution to the Berlin situation. However, the following recommendations are suggested for consideration:

1. Other Allied free nations should be urged to make additional contributions to the total defense strength in Western Europe. This would result in an effective show of unity among the members of the Western alliance.
2. If it is practicable, our most modern weapons should be exchanged for less modern equipment in West Berlin, so that they would be clearly in evidence. The U.S. contributions to this exchange should include small numbers of new M-60 tanks, M-113 armored personnel carriers, and T-235 self-propelled artillery.
3. Careful thought and consideration should be given to plans for placing a single commander in command of the defense of West Berlin in case of an emergency.
4. We should explore the possibilities and advantages of having the West Berlin police force gradually expanded from the current one to one ratio with Allied troops to a two to one ratio. In this connection, consideration should be given to the incorporation of such police force into the defense plans for West Berlin.
5. Consideration should be given to plans for top officials of other major free nations visiting West Berlin at irregular but frequent intervals, upon the pre-arranged invitation from the Federal Republic or West Berlin.
6. A plan should be readied for the imposition of a selective list of economic sanctions. This should be considered for introduction gradually in the form of embargoes on a limited number of key items, and every effort should be made to have all NATO nations cooperate. Withdrawal of such sanctions would comprise a negotiation factor.

~~SECRET~~

- 6 -

7. Participation in the Leipzig Fair should be informally discouraged; gradually increasing restrictions should be imposed on travel from the East to the West Zone.

8. Key quotations from the President's July 25 address and from formal statements made during the recent trip should be translated into appropriate languages, printed, and widely distributed through the USIA or other organizations.

9. The West Berlin government should announce that it is financing, with token contributions from NATO countries, a large international educational, cultural, or scientific center in the city.

10. Every effort should be made to improve communications between and among the Western powers so as to reduce the time factor required for coordinated reaction to emergencies or changes in the Berlin situation.

~~SECRET~~